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The Abortion Decision: A Phenomenological Study

by

Miri Robson

A THESIS

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W. H. Schmidt
Supervisor

Date April 12, 1985

Abstract

It was the intent of this study to investigate the process by which a significant decision was experienced and described by women who were faced with the problem of whether to continue or terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

To implement this intent, this study used a phenomenological-type approach. Studies in the tradition of cognitive-dissonance theory, behaviorism and the theory of choice were found to be incomplete and inadequate as they perceive decisions as isolated entities that need not be considered within the larger context of the person's life. The phenomenological literature, on the other hand, has stressed that individual decisions are related to each other, and they arise out of those fundamental projects that constitute the totality of an individual's life.

The subjects of this study were four young, unmarried women, all of whom were in the first trimester of their pregnancy. The interview took place during the time that each woman was struggling to come to a decision regarding her unwanted pregnancy. All the subjects chose to have an abortion. Through probing and open-ended questions, the meanings of the decision and its process were explored.

Analysis of these experiences revealed that decision-making regarding abortion is a dynamic process. Utilizing the Janis and Mann (1974, 1977) model of decision-making under conflict, four stages in pregnancy resolution were identified. Examination of this process

revealed three main issues as being evaluated by women considering abortion. They were: personal issues of autonomy and self determination; moral issues of life; and social considerations of normative expectations and support systems. It was found that the extent to which having an abortion is a woman's autonomous choice, and the degree of support she receives from significant others, play an important role in the abortion decision. It was also demonstrated that the decision to have an abortion remained an ambivalent one even after that decision had been finally reached. Furthermore, a decision was found to be a concrete response to the women's own existential situation, and the full significance of the decision could not be understood unless viewed within the larger horizons of each woman's life.

It was concluded that in order to fully understand a significant life decision, as in the decision regarding abortion, it has to be seen in the context of the total life situation and in relationship to other decisions and motivations affecting the individual.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Nature and Purpose of the Study

It was the intent of this research to study decision making as it was experienced by subjects who were faced with the necessity of having to deliberately direct their lives vis-a-vis a significant issue. To implement this intent, young unmarried women, who were faced with the decision of whether they would or would not have an abortion, were used as subjects.

Few decisions have as potentially a profound effect upon women's lives as the choice to continue or terminate an unwanted pregnancy. Statistics indicate that increasing numbers of young women over the past decade have faced an unwanted pregnancy (Baldwin, 1977). Reflecting the rise in unwanted pregnancies, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of legal abortions performed (National Center for Health Statistics, 1979). Despite evidence that there are few negative psychological consequences as a result of abortion (Greenglass, 1976; Ford, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, & Long, 1972; Niswander, Singer & Singer, 1972; Smith, 1973) - the decision to abort involves considerable difficulty. Most women see the abortion decision as stressful and emotionally difficult (Freeman, 1978; Zimmerman, 1977).

Research on abortion has focused largely on surveys of personal attitudes and assessments of sociodemographic

characteristics of women choosing to deliver or abort an unwanted pregnancy (e.g Diamond, Steinhoff, Palmore & Smith, 1973; Olson, 1980; Oskofsky, 1972). Existing research is largely complicated by the rapid shifts that have occurred in the legal status and availability of abortion which have serious ramifications for the experience (Adler, 1975; Zimmerman, 1981). It is also complicated by the strong moral and emotional feelings about abortion to which researcher, respondents, and society as a whole are subject.

In short, although abortion has been the subject of much philosophical scrutiny and political debate, scant consideration has been given to women's special perception of a most significant and conflicted decision in their lives.

In view of the complexity of the situation and the stresses it creates for many women, it is most important to understand how women come to decide whether to continue or terminate their unwanted and unplanned pregnancies and how this decision might affect their lives. Counsellors, doctors and educators need to be aware of the issues women are dealing with so that they can foresee potential problems and facilitate appropriate solutions. Furthermore, a realistic appreciation of how their lives might be affected by their decision, will help those women make informed decisions.

In an initial attempt to understand the full significance of the decision-making process, attention was directed toward the traditional as well as the

phenomenological literature. The former provided a variety of theoretical perspectives and investigations. In fact, it offered everything from cognitive models of decision-making (Festinger,1964) to theories of man as incapable of making decisions (Skinner,1971).

It was found that within this broad body of traditional literature, decision-making was not studied as an unfolding, interrelated phenomenon, but rather as an isolated phenomenon. The decision-making was not grasped and respected as a process within the larger context of the person's life. Moreover, traditional studies failed to understand and conceptualize the decision-making process from the perspective of the individual who is making that decision.

Generally speaking, the traditional studies were found to be inadequate and incomplete in exploring the process of the abortion decision and its special meaning for women who are facing this situation. Therefore, an exploration was made of the phenomenological literature.

Sartre (1962,1963,1964), Ricoeur (1966, 1978), and Schutz (1970,1971) have all suggested that the decision making process should be seen in the context of personal, unfolding, life projects. The individual's concrete decisions relate to one another, and indicate the direction that he or she is taking in life. These many and varied concrete decisions define the projects that are of value and significance to the individual and the latter, in turn, give

meaning to the concrete decisions.

Important, interrelated aspects of the phenomenon emerged from the literature survey and my own personal reflections in regard to the abortion decision. These motivated the following questions:

1. How does the process of the abortion decision-making unfold?
2. How does a woman, who is in the position of having to make such a decision, understand herself and what she is moving toward, in particular:
   a. How does she relate to the personal issues in the decision?
   b. How does she perceive herself in relation to significant others, her society and perhaps her religion?
3. How does the decision relate to other projects and decisions in the woman's life?

General overview

The traditional and phenomenological literature on decision-making is reviewed in further detail in chapter II. Chapter III describes the research design and procedure of the study. Themes which emerged from the case studies are reviewed in chapter IV and discussed in chapter V. The study concludes with implications for further research and recommendations for pregnancy counselors.

Chapter II

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RELATED RESEARCH

In the following review of related literature, traditional, as well as phenomenological theories will be discussed. Related research pertaining to this literature will be reviewed. The main differences between the two approaches will then be summarized.

The literature reviewed here concerns methodological problems in studying decision-making, and though some of this literature deals with the specific decision to have an abortion, the emphasis is not on the results of the literature on abortion, but on the research methodology. The findings of previous research on abortion will be introduced in chapter V, after the results of the present study have been presented. The justification for this is that the focus of the study is not on testing hypotheses arising from any of the extant theories of decision-making, but at discovering and describing the concrete meanings of the abortion decision for four women who were facing an unwanted pregnancy. The resulting "theory" is based on the data, as it has emerged from these descriptions.

TRADITIONAL LITERATURE

In the following review of the traditional literature on the phenomenon of decision-making, three approaches are considered. They are cognitive-dissonance, behaviorism and

the theory of choice.

These three approaches are considered, in order to better understand how traditional theories conceptualize decision-making. Further, they should provide a contrast that will generate and clarify my own thinking.

Cognitive-Dissonance

Cognitive-Dissonance studies of decision-making have focused upon subjects enacting choices in contrived experimental situations. The theoretical formulations that have suggested, as well as emerged from, these studies derive from the realization that human beings seem to be attuned to certain types of behavioral inconsistency. When such is the case, they attempt to alter their beliefs so that it seems more harmonious (Shaw, 1982). Festinger (1964) asserted that dissonance is an inevitable consequence of decision. This proposition is based upon the notion that an individual must be faced with a conflict situation before a decision can be made; that is, a "decision" between an alternative that is all good and one that is all bad cannot properly be called a decision. Therefore, there may be decisions between two completely negative choices, two alternatives having both positive and negative aspects, or among several alternatives. In the typical case, the choice of one alternative results in a dissonant relation which consists of the negative aspects of the chosen alternative and the positive aspects of the rejected alternative.

The magnitude of postdecision dissonance, according to Festinger (1964), is determined by the importance of the decision, the relative attractiveness of the unchosen alternative, and the degree of cognitive overlap of the alternatives involved in the decision. The more important the decision, and the more attractive the unchosen alternative, the greater the dissonance. The effect of the cognitive overlap is perhaps less evident. The consideration here is that many elements may be common to the two alternatives. Such common elements would not be expected to contribute to dissonance, and so the greater the cognitive overlap, the less the dissonance created by the decision.

Pressure to reduce postdecision dissonance may be manifested by revocation of the decision, altered attractiveness of the alternatives, or the creation of cognitive overlap.

Later modifications and limitations of the theory were suggested by several researchers (Aronson, 1968; Brehm & Cohen, 1962; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). Aronson (1968) suggested that the original theory of cognitive dissonance made no provision for individual differences and proposed three ways that individual differences are relevant to the theory: 1. People differ in their ability to tolerate dissonance, 2. People may differ in their preferred mode of dissonance reduction, and 3. People may differ in the kind of things that are dissonant or consonant.

Brehm and Cohen (1962) emphasized the roles of commitment and volition in the arousal of dissonance. They maintained that whether one cognition follows from another depends on the degree of commitment. For example, if a person makes a decision but is free to reverse the decision, no dissonance should be aroused, whereas an irreversible decision would be expected to create dissonance and lead to dissonance - reducing processes. Volition or choice is also important: the individual must believe that he or she has acted voluntarily in order for dissonance to occur. More recently, Wicklund and Brehm (1976) conducted an extensive review of the literature dealing with the theory and concluded that a necessary modification is that the person must feel responsible for the decision in order for dissonance to occur.

Chapnis and Chapnis (1964) bring to light several ways that cognitive-dissonance theories have been found to be incomplete. In their article, they argue that even though the simplicity of the theory seems inviting, it is questionable whether it is possible to reduce complex social situations to two dissonant statements. They draw attention to several features of cognitive-dissonance that are implicitly accepted in the results but not accounted for in the experimental design. For instance, when the experimenter creates various degrees of dissonance by introducing various discrepant statements, it is not known for certain if dissonance really occurred for the subject. There is no

provision within the experimental situation for knowing how the subject perceived the dissonant statements, as they were given by the experimenter. The possibility exists that it was some other circumstance such as the acquisition of new information which created the dissonance. Since the subject is not asked to verify what he actually experiences, it is impossible to draw definite conclusions.

For the most part, the majority of cognitive dissonance studies are concerned with beliefs held by an individual after a decision has been enacted, i.e., the researcher is attentive to those beliefs that specifically point to dissonance-reduction following the decision. When these anticipated beliefs are present, they fulfill the researcher's hypothesis and dissonance is said to have occurred. Dissonance-reduction is an observable human phenomenon in the sense that there frequently appears to be some lingering doubt following the enactment of a significant decision. It is understandable that ambiguous feelings surrounding a significant decision continue to persist even though the decision has been enacted. However, whether this lingering doubt can be reduced to purely cognitive statements, as cognitive dissonance theorists would have us believe, is questionable.

It was not the intent of this study to focus attention solely upon post-decision beliefs or behavior. Rather, this study assumes that in order to fully understand a decision, the researcher must move beyond merely understanding the

relationship that exists between various items of information, i.e., cognitive statements concerning post-decision beliefs. This research seeks to understand whatever reveals itself in the process of individuals making a significant life decision.

Behaviorism

One of the significant implications of the philosophy held by behavioristic psychology, is that the possibility of making choices is an illusion. People cannot make choices because they are totally determined by forces over which they have no control.

Skinner, in his book Beyond Freedom and Dignity (1971), attempts to show why it is essential for a person to move beyond the illusion of choice. He regards any appeal to the notions of choice and decision-making as unwise because:

- They are illusions of everyday life as well as of science.
- They prevent us from recognizing our subserviance to the control of the environment and thus limit our growth and progress in such a way as to render us inefficient and ineffective.

Skinner is able to make these statements because he conceives of the human organization as a thing essentially controlled and determined by the environment. A human being is fundamentally a passive recipient of the pushes and pulls of the environment, as well as the pressures of his/her own

biological nature. According to Skinner, the responses made by the individual are independent of choice; they are also independent of any anticipation of the future.

In his book, About Behaviorism (1974), Skinner attempts to clarify and defend the position set forth in his earlier book, Beyond Freedom and Dignity (1971). The notion of choice and decision-making is one of the areas that he has chosen to address.

According to Skinner, choice, decision and the solving of problems is limited to either escaping from or avoiding an unpleasant state. He contends that a person's reasons for wanting to avoid an indecisive state are brought about by external conditions in the environment and have nothing to do with his/her own reflective thoughts or feelings. The person, in order to escape indecision, must come up with appropriate responses that will produce the neccessary changes in the environment. Skinner does not allow for the creative realization of an imagined future. He readily admits that it is the individual who must come up with the necessary responses to bring about change in the environment. He still maintains that, "there is no place in the scientific position for a self as a true originator or initiator of action"(p.25). The behavior enacted by the person can only be understood when considered in relation to events in the environment. These events include the person's genetic history, his/her environmental history, and the present setting.

Skinner still maintains that the individual's wants are externally determined and all behavior is modified by, and in relation to, enviromental feedback. Nowhere in his philosophy does Skinner allow for the individual to choose his/her projects by free choice.

A Theory of Choice

Philosophers have debated extensively the question of free will, or the freedom of persons to make choices about the things that affect their lives. Behavioral scientists, as discussed previously, usually take the position that freedom of choice to behave in one way or another, is a myth. Behavior is determined by needs, personality characteristics, and other variables that constrain the person to behave in this way and not in that way. This philosophical controversy has not been resolved nor can the behavioral scientist prove that determinism is a valid principle. However, the arguments and beliefs of academicians have little consequence for the average person; people "know" that they have freedom of choice and action and behave accordingly. Thus, it is the perception of freedom of choice that is important for behavior (Steiner, 1970).

The theory of choice (Steiner, 1980) is concerned with the variables that determine the perception of choice and the consequences of such perceptions for the variety of psychological processes and behavior. According to Steiner

(1980), the attractiveness or desirability of an option is a function of its utility; the degree to which its positive benefits outweigh its negative aspects. Steiner thinks of desired outcomes as payoffs and undesired ones as costs. The utility of an outcome is expressed by the following formula (Steiner, 1980, p.7):

$$\text{Expected Utility} = \sum_{1}^{n} (\text{valence of payoff} \times \text{probability of payoff}) - \sum_{1}^{n} (\text{valence of cost} \times \text{probability of cost})$$

where : n = the number of payoffs or costs to which the individual attends

valence = the desirability of the outcome (payoff or costs)

probability = the perceived likelihood of the occurrence of the outcome.

According to this formula, the net gain (positive or negative) that the person believes will result from the selection of an option, is the expected utility of that option. Therefore, an option is desirable to the extent that expected payoffs exceed expected costs.

Steiner further argues that an option's potential to satisfy, depends on its expected utility, but its attractiveness depends in part on the expected utilities of other alternatives with which it is compared. Available options are compared with one another and/or with other

options that constitute a salient comparison set.

Steiner's formulations are in agreement with the views of many other theorists (e.g Edwards, 1954; Fishbein, 1965; Restle, 1961). All models share the general assumption that individuals' choices are at least partly determined by their beliefs about the consequences that could result from making any given choice. The probability that a specific behavior will occur is seen as a function of the ratio of perceived advantages of performing a behavior to the perceived disadvantages, either by itself (the greater the ratio, the greater the likelihood of the behavior) or in comparison to the ratio yielded by the alternative(s).

Several models of pregnancy decision-making typically describe the abortion decision in terms of a weighing of advantages and disadvantages of alternate behaviors (Bracken, Klerman, & Bracken, 1978; Luker, 1974; Smetana & Adler, 1980). For instance, one investigator (Luker, 1974) asserts that women consider the costs and beliefs associated with contraceptive use and nonuse. She concludes that unwanted pregnancy may result from a rational decision-making process in which assessment of the subjectively perceived costs of contraceptive behavior and the perceived costs of pregnancy create an orientation toward risk-taking. Actual nonuse of contraceptives results from an assessment of the subjective probabilities assigned to pregnancy and the costs of terminating a pregnancy should it occur.

Bracken and his colleagues (1978) have attempted to apply the theoretical work of Janis and Mann (1977) of conflict resolution, to decision-making concerning pregnancy outcome. Accordingly, they proposed four cognitive - affective stages in pregnancy resolution: 1. acknowledgement of the pregnancy 2. formulation of alternative outcomes and acceptance or rejection of each 3. consideration of the relative merits of the available options, e.g., abortion, adoption, or motherhood 4. commitment to the chosen outcome. Each step in this process of conflict resolution is a precondition for succeeding steps and determines the ensuing conflict. In addition, each decision in the series reflects an attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance and maximize net gains.

According to another model based on similar assumptions (Smetana & Adler, 1980), women weigh their beliefs about significant others' expectations regarding their unwanted pregnancies, against their beliefs about the consequences that might result from either having an abortion or having the child. These beliefs produce their attitudes toward abortion, and these, in turn, determine whether or not they will decide to have an abortion.

Do all women in this situation of conflict and choice actually weigh the relative advantages and disadvantages of alternative behaviors? Proponents of rational/benefit models, such as those described above, argue that the rationality implied in these models is "psycho - logical,"

and that it is the psychologically perceived rather than the actual advantages and disadvantages of each alternative that are weighed (Adler, 1979a). Smetana (1982) asserts that this weighing of costs and benefits provides an inaccurate description of the decision-making process, particularly among young women. She claims, that it does not include the less "rational" aspects of human behavior such as: conflicting beliefs and motives, social constraints, and the complexity of situations.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEORIES

Phenomenological literature has stressed that each person's decisions are concrete responses to his/her own existential situation and the full significance of decisions cannot be understood unless viewed within the broader horizons of each person's life.

Sartre (1962, 1963a, 1964), Ricoeur (1966, 1978), Schutz (1970,1971), and Cloonan (1969, 1971) have all suggested that the decision-making process should be seen in the context of personal, unfolding life projects. An individual's concrete decisions are more or less integrated; they relate to one another, and they point toward where the person is going in life. In the following section I will review the above theories and their approach to the understanding of decisions in one's life.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no phenomenological studies of significant life decisions, that

is, decisions that profoundly shape and affect the meaning of an individual's life. Sartre, in his works on Genet (1963 b) and Baudelaire (1950), utilize individual reflections based upon their lives to work their way back to the specific decisions and motives that generated the particular shape and meanings of their lives. Cloonan (1971) conducted a phenomenological study of decision-making but his subjects did not face a decision situation which involved major life consequences. It was included as a related research because it deals with the process of how the subjects made the decision and it illuminates how the decision relates to other projects in the person's life.

Sartre

Totally opposed to the theoretical position held by Skinner (1971, 1974) is one espoused by Sartre (1962, 1963a, 1964) who claims that if the individual was totally controlled by his/her environment, conflict would not exist. However, people do not live free of conflict, and their conflicts are grounded in the essential possibility of human choice. Sartre (1962) emphasizes the essential dignity of the person as a being who is free, i.e., not externally determined. A person's freedom can be immediately experienced in the agony and anguish of making decisions. One is condemned to choose one's own being. One must, at some point, commit himself/herself to particular projects, and once having made that commitment, he/she is responsible

for it. At the same time, choices, although essentially free, can entail conflict and ambiguity, as Sartre (1964) states:

> It should be observed that the choice of total ends although totally free is not necessarily nor even frequently made in joy... the choice can be effected in resignation or uneasiness; it can be flight; it can be realized in bad faith (p.448).

According to Sartre (1963a), there is a purposiveness to our moving in a certain direction. It is this quality that distinguishes the way in which the world appears and thereby affects the choices and actions that are made. A person projects himself/herself toward a future, i,e., towards a world that he/she is in the process of creating and realizing by the choices that are made. All of the concrete choices point to the fundamental projects, or the earlier, still more original choices.

A person's way of being in the world is an expression of the fundamental project. When Sartre (1964) speaks about a fundamental project, he is describing that which one has taken up and is not an external factor that causes one to act in certain ways. It is the fundamental project that gives significance to the many concrete choices. These, in turn, help one to articulate and realize the fundamental project. Stated somewhat differently, the many concrete choices express and give form to the fundamental project.

Sartre (1964) goes on to say that our choices are not merely directed toward some simple goal, but rather, they should be seen in the perspective of a way of life. A

person's choices are filled with meanings; they are satisfactory to the extent that they support the project and they are unsatisfactory to the extent that they are not integrated with the underlying project.

According to Sartre, one is free to change his/her fundamental project. When this occurs, the meaning of individual, concrete choices change accordingly. Projects are open; there is always the possibility of further modifications. Changes in the direction of concrete choices may provide evidence of a change in fundamental choices. He further states:

> In the case of a radical modification of our fundamental project...we temporalize a project which we are, and we make known to ourselves by a future the being which we have chosen; thus the pure present belongs to the new temporalization as a beginning and it receives from the future which has just arisen its own nature as a beginning. It is the future alone, in fact, which can turn back on the pure present in order to qualify it as a beginning...thus the present of the choice belongs already, as an integral structure, to the newly begun totality. But on the other hand, it is not possible for this choice not to determine itself in connection with the past (p.442).

In summary, according to Sartre (1962,1963, 1964), to understand a concrete choice we must apprehend the fundamental project which it serves to express. By the same token, to recognize a fundamental project we must apprehend the meaning of each concrete choice. Sartre seeks out the source of meaning of the many concrete choices. He seeks the ground that serves as the center of reference for other emergent meanings.

Ricoeur

When decision-making is seen from within the framework provided by Paul Ricoeur (1966, 1978), it can be understood that to decide is to turn oneself towards one's project. That is to say, there is a basic dialectical relationship that exists between the motives for making a particular decision and the intended project. According to Ricoeur (1966), decisions and motives imply each other: they are linked together in such a way that each helps to define and clarify the other.

Project, as well as decision, points to the future: project is projected. Ricoeur (1966) states that the anticipated future action leads one to look at the possibilities that will open up because of one's decision. Ricoeur also points out that the particular, concrete decision has implications for other decisions that flow from, as well as reveal, the underlying project. He makes clear that any concrete decision can only be understood when seen within the larger horizon of the individual's life.

Schutz

Alfred Schutz (1970, 1971) investigates several areas which speak directly to the concepts of choice and decision-making. Specifically he refers to the concept of action project,and "because" and "in order to" motives.

When speaking about the concept of acting, Schutz (1971) distinguishes between action and act. He states:

"action shall designate human conduct as an ongoing process which is devised by the actor in advance, that is, which is based upon a preconceived project" (p. 67). The person confronted by an existential situation involving a choice, may actively pursue one of two possible choices of action. One may actively pursue a course of action or avoid taking any action. To Schutz, either of these two alternatives denotes action. The term 'act' on the other hand, shall designate the outcome of this ongoing process, that is, the accomplished action.

Schutz (1971) further speaks of the uniqueness involved in the time structure of the projected act. He states:

> All projecting, consists in an anticipation of future conduct by way of fantasising. In fantasising, I visualize in anticipation the action I am projecting as though it were already performed, completed. (p. 68)

Therefore, it is the act which is the starting point of all projecting. The person involved in making the decision must be able to visualize or fantasize in a relatively detailed way, the future that he is in the process of creating. "In projecting, I anticipate the act as already having been accomplished; I place myself imaginatively in the future perfect tense" (Schutz, 1971,Introduction XXXVIII). Only by being able to do this, will the person be able to re-create in reasonably complete fashion the course of action which will have brought about his future act.

Schutz (1970) also points out the unique time structure of the anticipated project and the various relationships which exist between the project and the two types of

motives. He distinguishes between two types of motives. The first type of motive is called the "in order to" motive and the second type is called the "because" motive. The primary difference between the two motives lies in their time structure. Schutz states that from the point of view of the actor, the "because" motive refers to past experiences. That is, the "because" motives can be explained on the basis of the actor's background, environment, or current disposition. The "in order to" motives involve ends to be achieved, goals sought for which are oriented toward the future. From the point of view of the actor this class of motives refers to his future.

In any decision-making situation, Schutz (1970) takes into account the larger context of the social world as well as the ways that project, action, motives, and biological situation are related and interrelated to one another.

Cloonan

Cloonan's study (1969, 1971) involved an experimental situation in which the subjects participated in the making of three decisons. They were: (a) to participate in the study (situational choice); (b) to decide between working with anagrams or "poser" problems (task decision); and (c) to do or not to do a second task (following through decision). The decision situations that Cloonan's subjects faced (unlike the decision situations in the present research) did not have major life consequences.

Nevertheless, his study is relevant to this research because he was interested in the process of how the subject made the decision, as well as how the decision illuminated and articulated the projects that the subject was living.

The notions of project, life project and situational project were found to be important in Cloonan's research. Project was seen as the past continuing to project itself into the present and future on the basis of experience. It is essential to the understanding of decision-making. Cloonan showed that decision was related to one's total life and was not an isolated event that can be added on to other isolated events to form a history or a composite of decision-making experiences. The many decisions that are made by a person are all integrated. They fit into and point toward the individual's orientation and movement. The life project is the theme that permeates one's life from birth to death. Decisions are made within the context of that movement and they define the individual.

Cloonan's study also spoke to the relation of situational project and situational decision. The various concrete situational decisions and projects gave meaning to the life project. Each situational project and decision, into which the person enters, can be seen as a possible way of exploring and creating new articulations of the life project.

According to Cloonan's study, once the subjects were committed to the situational decision, they already, in

their commitment, remained open to the possibility of the unexpected emerging from the new situation. When this did occur, subjects still continued in their commitment to the situational decision.

Cloonan found that predecision is a thematic constituent in all three decision types involved in his study. Life project, as pointed out by Cloonan, can be seen as the totality of man from birth to death. Situational projects are current articulations of the life project. All the historical predecisions are included in the life project as well as the situational projects.

Cloonan was able to see a definite evolution toward decision; decision-making was not an encapsulated experience, but rather, the making of decisions grew out of pre-decisions and defined one's life project. Decision and project were inseparable.

Summary of Phenomenological Literature

All the phenomenological literature on decision-making begins by acknowledging that a human being is an emerging person and that each person's unique way of relating to self, others, and the world is revealed through the decisions that are made. Therefore, all of our decisions express the meanings of our existence, even though we may not be explicitly aware of those meanings.

The phenomenological literature also stresses that each person's decisions are concrete responses to their own

existential situation. It is recognized that each person must decide and be responsible for who he/she is, has been, as well as who he/she will become. This is profoundly true when the decision involves undesirable or other significant life alternatives. Ultimately, each person will be held accountable for his/her decisions.

Finally, the phenomenological literature also reveals that decisions point toward, and arise out of, the same ground. It is this underlying ground that provides the theme of meaningful relationships among decisions.

COMPARISON OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND TRADITIONAL BASED RESEARCH ON DECISION-MAKING

The traditional as well as the phenomenological literature regards the decision-making process as a significant psychological phenomenon. All the theories are concerned with understanding and conceptualizing the decision-making process. Also, both bodies of literature seem to agree that once a significant decision has been enacted, there still exists some residual areas of conflict that cannot be completely denied.

Even though there are some ways in which the phenomenological and traditional literature agree, it can be seen from the review of the literature that phenomenologically based research reveals the decision-making process in a fundamentally different way. To begin with, phenomenological research studies the phenomenon

from the perspective of the subject who is making the decision. Traditional research, most often, studies the phenomenon from the researcher's perspective. Further, the traditional studies (with the exception of behaviorism) typically research only one aspect of the decision-making. For instance, cognitive dissonance theories focus primarily on post-decision behavior and beliefs. The theories of choice focus their attention on the actual decision. Behavioristic studies are concerned with predicting behavior that is not grasped as chosen, but rather, is caused by external stimuli. Therefore, their attention is focused upon events in the environment and their impact upon the subject. Thirdly, traditional research views pre-decision, actual-decision, and post-decision as independent phases. Each phase of the phenomenon is assumed to be understood without taking into account any other.

In phenomenological research, the decision is recognized and understood as already including the person's biography, as well as his/her present and future. Phases of the decision-making are recognized and analyzed but cannot be understood independently of their relatedness to each other. Furthermore, decisions implicate each other and must be studied and understood in their interrelatedness to one another.

It was the intent of this study not only to capture but also to reveal the essential structure of the decision-making process. The non-phenomenological studies

reviewed in this research present decision-making as an end product and not as a lived process.

In summary, the value of utilizing the phenomenological method, lies in its commitment to reveal the decision-making process from the perspective of the subject who is making that decision within the larger context of his/her life.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the decision-making process in relation to abortion as a significant decision in the life of four women. A qualitative descriptive methodological design, consistent with phenomenological goals and assumptions, has been used.

The value of utilizing the phenomenological method lies in its commitment to reveal in the fullest possible way the phenomenon that is being researched. This method requires an approach different from the "empirical" method. Whereas the latter takes concepts, viewpoints, and techniques from the natural sciences and applies them to the phenomena, the phenomenological approach goes directly to human phenomena, to the lived, day-to-day world of human subjects. Behavior is seen as a function of perception and personal meaning, rather than as a direct and predictable response to environmental stimuli (Combs, Richards & Richars, 1976). The goal is to understand, rather than to explain. Concepts and methods emerge as a necessary result of the study (Giorgi, 1970). The procedure is to first explore the human situation as it is lived and experienced by the subjects, then to provide a qualitative description of the subjects' experiences and its meaning to them. The phenomenologist's goal in exploring and describing meaning is to arrive at an understanding of the essence of the phenomena, by disclosing

their underlying structure (Giorgi, 1971b; Valle and King, 1978). The resulting "theory" is based on the data, as it has emerged from the underlying structure. Thus, hypotheses and theories are generated as the end result of the process. The theory is valid for those individuals studied and can be further developed and changed with investigation of more subjects and more experiences related to the phenomenon.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The phenomenological paradigm employs a variety of methodological techniques to explore human experience and disclose the underlying structure of psychological phenomena. In contrast to the natural science approach, which attempts to maintain a distance between its researchers and its subjects in the interest of 'objectivity', phenomenological methodology characteristically employs the reasearcher as a research instrument (Giorgi, 1970). The methodological techniques most commonly used are observations and interviews (Colaizzi, 1978), in which the researcher's probings, observations and inferences are valued as useful research tools (Giorgi, 1971b).

The main instrument used in the present study was the interview technique. A modified form of the unstructured interview, the focused interview, was employed in this study, because it capitalizes on the strengths of the unstructured interview while eliminating some of its

weaknesses (Cohen & Manion, 1980). The focused interview is non-directive in the sense that the questions asked are open - ended and in no fixed order but, unlike the unstructured interview, it is based on an interview guide which is constructed from a previous analysis of the problem. This allows the interviewer a more active role in the interview, while continuing to elicit responses from the individual's personal frame of reference. Although the scope of the interview is broadly defined by the objectives of the research and the questions asked, its purpose is to explore in depth the individual's subjective experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Giorgi (1970) brings to our attention the failure of empirical psychology to reflect upon the researcher and the assumptions he/she makes. He maintains that there is no such thing as pure fact: all facts are selected and interpreted by researchers who only grasp certain aspects of reality, depending upon their point of view. Therefore, it is essential not only to note the presence of researchers, but also to know about them-their assumptions, expectations, values, etc..

For the purpose of this study, an interview guide was devised. This guide was broadly based on existing research, the goals of the present research, as well as the investigator's personal perspective of the phenomenon under investigation. An outline of this interview guide is presented in Appendix A.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The participants

The women who participated in the study were referred by one family physician. Prior to the agreement to provide referrals, the investigator discussed with the physician the purpose and nature of the study. Potential subjects were assured by the physician that participation in the study was voluntary and that their decision would not affect the availability or quality of services they were eligible to receive. Women who chose to participate were contacted by the investigator and an interview appointment was set up.

Four women participated in the study (for information on subjects refer to Appendix B). All women were already pregnant, but their pregnancy had not progressed beyond the first trimester, i.e., the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. All four women were unmarried, between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine. One woman was divorced, living with her three year old daughter. One woman had had a previous abortion at the age of fourteen. As regards education, two women were involved in higher education: One had completed two years of university, and the second had completed university and was teaching kindergarten children. Further, she had applied and had been accepted into a program of graduate studies. The remaining two women had completed high school and were working: one at a book-store; the other woman was working as a cosmetician and had plans to study

fashion-design the next year. All four women were Protestants.

At the time of the interview, three of the women were considering the possibility of terminating their pregnancy. The fourth woman (Suzan) had already made the decision to carry the pregnancy to term and have the child. In the interview, she discussed her decision to continue the present pregnancy and retrospectively reflected on her previous decision to have an abortion, which took place six months prior to the time of the interview.

Interview procedure

All the interviews took place in the family physician's clinic. They were conducted by myself and ranged in length from 1.5 to 2 hours. One interview was conducted with each woman. It was found that young, pregnant women did not seek medical assistance until they were six to eight weeks pregnant. Therefore, a second interview, prior to the induced abortion, was not feasible because of lack of time.

Although eight women were interviewed initially, complete data were obtained for only four. One interview was lost due to a defective tape, and three other interviews did not obtain sufficient material for analysis. Consequently, four interviews were written up.

The interviews were conducted in an informal, relaxed way. After the initial introduction, a general description about the nature and purpose of the study was given, and

some personal background information about the investigator was provided. At this point, respondents were provided with assurance of confidentiality: the investigator promised that she would not contact the subject's parents, or any member of her family concerning the subject's pregnancy, and that any personal names or places would be deleted from the tape in order to protect the subject's identity.

Each woman was asked to discuss the decision she faced (for interview guide refer to Appendix A). The questions were open-ended enough so that the subject was free to describe what was meaningful and significant for her in her decision-making process. Each subject was also told that any biographical information that she would be willing to give would be very helpful. Again, the investigator allowed the subject to reveal those areas of her biography that were significant from her perspective.

Each interview terminated with a request for the woman's feedback on the interview.

Each of the interviews was tape recorded.

Analysis of the data

In an attempt to comprehend the psychological significance of the interview material, as it was given by each of the subjects, the analysis proceeded according to a sequence of steps.

Following each interview, a typed verbatim transcript was made. All personal names and places that might lead to

the subject's identity were deleted from the tapes. For the investigator to become familiar with the data, the typed version was read while the researcher listened to the original tape recorded interview. That is, by reading as well as listening to the interview, the investigator became intimately familiar with the mood and quality of the subject's description.

In order to make the analysis of the data more expedient, the raw data were divided into natural meaning units. Typically, the subject's answer to a particular question constituted a natural meaning unit. Once the meaning units were established, the themes inherent within each unit were sought and summarized into simple statements. The process follows that described by Giorgi (1971 a).

The two-step procedure of identifying the meaning units and summarizing the central theme of each of these units served a dual purpose. First, it refamiliarized the researcher with the tone of each interview. Second, it reduced the interview data to a simpler, more manageable form, without deleting any of the information. In order to reduce researcher's bias, this process was conducted with an attitude of maximum openness, as recomended by Giorgi (1971a), and the specific aim of the study was not yet taken into account.

Once the themes were established, they were brought together and compared with all four interviews so that their interrelatedness, as well as what they collectively revealed

of the decision-making process, could be seen more readily. The themes were originally identified as entities in themselves. When integration of the themes became evident, a unifying process emerged which revealed the development of the abortion decision.

The new interview data was continually referred to during this process, and excerpts from the interviews were integrated into the descriptive material in order to ensure that each woman's own perceptions were being represented as accurately as possible.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations of the study warrant mention. First, as in any case study approach, absolute generalization about human phenomena cannot be made based on this form of data. Results of this study are relevant for the four subject women. However it is possible to formulate a "naturalistic generalizaton" which can be adapted to different circumstances, according to how well it fits the context of the new situation. "It seldom takes the form of prediction but leads regularly to expectation" (Stake, 1978, p.6).

Second, the study was based exclusively on self-reports, and is therefore subject to the limitations of this methodology. In particular, as a product of the individual's perceptions, the accuracy of the self-report can be distorted by such factors as the individual's

self-awareness (or lack of it), ability to express herself, and willingness to reveal her personl life (Combs et al., 1976). The fact that these women were all articulate and personally motivated to participate, controls this limitation to some extent. Further, the positive rapport judged to exist between the investigator and the respondents was also regarded as a basis for the credibility of the information provided. In addition to the researcher's subjective impressions, the conclusion that good rapport was established was based on the positive feedback statements expressed by all the women. This feedback was given at the end of the interview and was also expressed to the family physician at subsequent visits.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Each case study describes a unique woman and her subjective experience of the abortion decision. At the same time, however, these experiences are linked together by a number of common themes, forming a structural pattern which contributes to a more general understanding of the abortion decision. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the major themes arising from the interviews.

First Reaction: Disbelief and Dismay

In the present study, each of the four women's immediate response to the discovery of her pregnancy was one of disbelief. While each woman admits, in her own unique way, that she "knew" or "felt" that she was pregnant before the pregnancy was actually confirmed, it was much more difficult to face the fact that it was truly her pregnancy. Unwanted pregnancy was always thought of as something that happened to other women. For a while, each woman continued to naively hope that she was not actually pregnant and the delay in her menstruation cycle was due to reasons other than pregnancy. Once the unplanned and unwanted pregnancy was confirmed, all four women expressed feelings of shock and dismay.

Betty had been quite certain that she was pregnant several weeks before the pregnancy test was confirmed. She

had known for weeks that something was wrong with her because her body felt unfamiliar and she would find herself just sitting and crying. She further says that even though she knew that she was pregnant, she kept hoping that it would, somehow, go away.

Nancy was convinced that she knew her body well enough as she was using the same method of contraception for four years. She states: " We always think things like that might happen to somebody else, but never to us..." When she missed her period she knew "in the back of my mind" that something went wrong, but she kept hoping that it was just a false alarm, and she kept reassuring herself that "it's going to come, it's a bit late but it's because I'm worried about it."

Donna knew several girl-friends who went through the experience of abortion. She never thought she would find herself in this situation because "obviously I knew about birth control and I didn't take any chances... when I missed my period, I didn't really think I was pregnant because I had just gone off the pill and I thought I still had enough hormones, plus...I didn't want to think I was."

Suzan stopped taking the pill because of medical reasons. She was told on different occasions that it might be difficult for her to conceive. As she did not have any on-going relationship with the child's father, she felt that the odd chance of pregnancy was highly unlikely. Her first reaction was denial: "I simply didn't want to believe it

actually happened to me. It was so unexpected I simply couldn't accept it."

All four women experienced shock and dismay once they came to accept the fact of their pregnancy. They expressed emotions such as "being lost," "frightened," "tearful," and "very, very upset."

The Abortion Decision: A Change of Perspective

For each of the four women, the decision to terminate her unwanted pregnancy entailed a change of perspective. The situation in all its concreteness takes on a new dimension and is perceived differently once the individual herself stands within it. Nancy describes it in a most articulate way:

> Quite some time ago, we had a conversation about abortion, and he said he doesn't think it's right unless the woman has been raped, and I thought I agreed with him at the time...but I had to make this decision and he does support me now, so I guess that ideas can change. I guess you really don't know how you will react in a certain situation until you are confronted with it.

Donna recalls a conversation she had with her boy-friend several months ago:

> We talked about it, what will we do if it ever happened and he just kind of figured, get an abortion and get it over with. Now we find it a lot more difficult, just to get rid of it. There are lots of feelings involved, it's not quite the way we figured it out before.

Betty expressed similar thoughts. She had made an earlier decision that if she should ever become pregnant prior to being married, she would have an abortion. Even though she had already decided what she would do under such

circumstances, she admits that the actual decision is much more difficult than the hypothetical one. She states:

> I had it all worked out in my mind. It was all so logical and sensible, but when I suddenly had to really face it, it didn't seem so easy any more. My determination seems to have gone and it all seemed so much more difficult.

Suzan's experience was somewhat different as she does not describe a change of attitude like the one experienced by Nancy, Donna and Betty. She always held strong beliefs against abortion although six months ago she decided to terminate a previous unwanted pregnancy. Her decision was made in view of her special circumstances, but no change of attitudes occurred following the decision. She describes her experience as follows:

> I always wanted to have a child by that man. I always fantasized about it, and then, when it came down to realizing that I was pregnant, and it could have been his child, there was this horrible feeling of uncertainty about the identity of the father...not quite the way the fantasy went...I always felt quite strongly against abortions, even so I ended having one myself. When I think of it now, I know it was the right decision at the time, but I will never go through it again.

Personal Considerations

All four women considered the decision whether to terminate or to continue their unwanted pregnancy as a personal issue. They all felt that the abortion decision, like other personal decisions, should be viewed in the context of the choices an individual makes about her body and life. All see the issue of control over one's body as a preeminent concern. They all feel that the decision must

rest with the woman because the pregnancy is part of her body and because the decision would have the greatest potential impact upon her future plans.

Donna states:

> Everyone is an individual, it's a very personal thing...if a woman decides she is not ready for it, she should have the right to terminate her pregnancy. I can't see taking that right away from me especially as I will be the one who will have to bring up and provide for this baby.

Suzan states:

> I strongly believe in choice. If I choose abortion it's my personal choice. It's my life and I have to deal with it.

Nancy states:

> I don't think that anybody has the right to say to me, Oh, you are pregnant, you have no choice but to carry on with the pregnancy. It's my life and my body and my personal choice.

Betty states:

> It's definitely my choice. I have to live with it and I have to pay for the consequences. Having the child is going to severely affect my life, so it's my right and my choice to decide about things in my life.

While making a decision concerning the unwanted pregnancy, all four women were concerned with personal issues such as: achieving personal goals and past commitments, establishing identity, financial security and assuming the responsibilities of early motherhood.

All four women have goals and commitments for the future. Donna and Suzan are already engaged in these commitments. Nancy and Betty are working towards realizing their plans.

Suzan has applied and been accepted to graduate studies. She cannot visualize herself in the role of a single mother and a student. If she keeps the baby, she has no doubt she will have to give up her graduate studies.

Donna attends second year at the university. Her unplanned and unwanted pregnancy forces her to evaluate the effect of having a child upon her and her boy-friend's careers and life styles. She states:

> There is no way I can keep it now. I'll have to give up everything I worked for: my studies, my career, my future...we plan to do a lot of travelling after we both finish our studies, and if by then we are still together we shall get married and start a family.

Nancy is divorced and lives with her three year old daughter. At present, she works at a book-store and struggles to support herself and her daughter. She has definite plans which she hopes to achieve in the future.

> I want to go back to school and learn business management, I want to start my own business and I want to travel. I want lots of things for myself and my daughter, and I plan to achieve it. A second baby in my situation will just ruin it all.

Betty works at present as a cosmetician but hopes that by next year she would save enough money to move East and study fashion design. She feels that having a baby, at this stage in her life, will postpone, or more likely, prevent her from ever achieving this dream.

The need to establish one's identity and become an autonomous self is a concern expressed by Nancy, Betty and Donna. They all fear that having a child at this point in their life, will interfere with achieving this personal

need.

Nancy states:

> I want to find myself first, and my place in life. I want to know where I'm going so I can give my kids some guidance. If I know who I am, and I like who I am, then I think my children will respect me more, they might take it as guidance.

Betty states:

> I guess everything is somehow tied to my personal identity. Although I think I would like to be a fashion designer, I don't always feel so sure about it. And I feel that if I had a child now, that would definitely limit my life. It will limit the direction I could take, you know, in choices. And right now, I'm fighting any kind of limits like that.

Donna states:

> I'm 19, and I've finished two years in University, but...sometimes I feel as if I'm only a kid, I sometimes ask myself, who am I really? what do I want out of my life? It will be better for myself and any future kids that I might have, if I know myself better first.

All four women are financially insecure and each one envisioned herself in a less than adequate financial situation if she was to continue the pregnancy and keep the child. When each of the four women entertained the possibility of continuing the pregnancy, similar future worlds were foreseen by each of them. Each woman saw herself as a single parent, who has to provide for a child with very limited financial resources. For all the women it meant going on welfare and coping on a very tight budget.

Coping with the responsibilities of early motherhood and the restrictions that these tasks would impose on their life style, was a common concern mentioned by all four women. Donna, Betty and Suzan felt they couldn't have coped,

with the responsibilities and the change a baby would have created in their lives. The assumption of full responsibility for the care of their babies meant a restriction of their normal activities which required a major adjustment. It also required a shift in their priorities and a change of plans and projects.

Suzan states:

> A responsibility for a child means less freedom and independence, less personal time. It was going to change my whole life-style. I have been working on my independence for fifteen years. I have a wide circle of friends and I'm used to come and go whenever I want to. A child would have changed all that and I was not ready to accept this kind of a change.

Donna states:

> I'm far too young to tie myself with a baby at home. Raising a baby is a big responsibility and I couldn't have coped with it.

Betty states:

> Being a mother is a lot of responsibility. I saw how my sister struggled with their baby for the first few months. She was all the time tired and so irritable. So me, doing all these alone without any help, and not being able to go out, I think I would have gone out of my mind!

Nancy, too , felt that as a single parent, a second child would bring extra responsibilities, financial difficulties and emotional stress which she couldn't have coped with. She expresses particular concern for the effect that a second child might have had on her daughter. She says:

> I almost feel that I was betraying her if I kept it, because we have such a strong relationship and we do everything together and I don't want anything to come between us either. In such a short life-time she had to face so many things, you know, her father and I

> splitting up and I just don't want any more traumas in her life right now. I really feel that she needs all my attention right now.

Relationship With Significant Others

In the process of coming to a decision, each woman was concerned with the relationship with significant others she had in her life. These relationships include: her parents, her boy-friend, and her peers. Each woman feared the loss of love and support of these significant others in her life.

All four women claimed that their parents would have supported their decision to have an abortion, had they known about the unwanted pregnancy. Nevertheless, all four women chose to hide their situation from their parents and their peers. They all attempted, even when the subsequent consequences were severe, e.g., an extra sense of loneliness, to preserve their image in the face of others.

All four women rationalize their decision to keep their abortion hidden from parents and friends. They all claim they don't want to burden their parents with their problems, admitting indirectly that the situation will cause worry and upset to their families. Donna openly admits: "My mom will agree with my decision, but she will be very upset, kind of let down." Suzan expresses fear for the loss of love and respect she might have to face: "part of the fear for telling people was that they will hate me, that they might think I'm a horrible person..." She eventually told one of her sisters about the abortion experience "mainly because

she has had an abortion when she was 16, that's why I felt I could tell her."

A major consideration in the decision-making was the support each woman got from her boy-friend. Nancy describes:

> The hardest part was not whether to have an abortion or not, the hardest part was telling my boy-friend, not knowing what his reaction might be...I had all these visions in my mind that he'll say, well if you are going to have an abortion I'm leaving, I've nothing to do with you, and that was the worst part. So, when I eventually told him and he completely supported me, I was extremely relieved."

Donna and Betty also received support from their boy-friends for their decision to terminate the pregnancy. Suzan was the only one who chose not to tell her boy-friend about the pregnancy because she was uncertain of the father's identity. Further, her relationship with her boy-friend had broken off shortly before the pregnancy had been confirmed, and realizing that he was a married man, she chose not to further complicate his life. Suzan was also the one who found the period of time prior to the abortion the most stressful.

Concern For The Fetus

All four women considered the fetus in their decision whether to terminate or continue their unwanted pregnancy. Suzan considers the moral issue of life as her main concern. She considers the fetus a human being from the time of conception and therefore, the act of abortion is conceived by her as a killing of a human being. It is interesting to note that when she retrospectively reflects on the abortion

decision-making, the thought of the fetus as a human being was negated, or "blocked" as she terms it. She decided to terminate her pregnancy in view of the particular circumstances that existed for her at the time, and her personal needs. She says:

> I was already in the process of having a personal breakdown when I found out that I was pregnant... I felt very sick, I literally felt as if there was poison running through my whole system, through my mind and my body. I felt that anything I touch or do , actually hurts this baby inside me, as if it's being poisoned by being connected to me... it felt not right to carry the child in the frame of being that I was in at the time. It felt like somehow I was doing more harm to the child if I was carrying him in this state. I strongngly believe that how a child is carried affects him through his whole life, and I was in absolutely no frame of mind to give him anything positive at all.

After the abortion, Suzan experienced a severe sense of guilt over what she described as killing her own baby. She says:

> After it was all over, all these negative feelings started that I have killed the baby, something that didn't quite occur to me before the abortion. I must have blocked it out somehow, and as soon as it was actually done, I felt empty, a horrible feeling of emptiness. The words that kept going through my mind were that I have killed that baby..."

Nancy seems to stand on the other end of this spectrum of opinions. She does not consider the fetus as a human being till the time of birth, when it is physically separated from the mother. She views the child as a physical extension of the mother during pregnancy. Therefore, the moral issue of life did not entail a major conflict in her decision-making process. She says:

> Right now, I consider it just an extra organ. It could become a baby, but right now it is just an extra tissue. When I think about it right now, I just can't see a baby there.

Betty and Donna believe that the fetus becomes a human being toward the end of the first trimester of the pregnancy, rather than at conception or at birth. Donna does not consider her abortion a moral issue as she is "unable to visualize the baby as a human being, the pregnancy is not visible, and right now I don't feel anything towards the baby." Betty expresses similar feelings. In her particular stage of pregnancy, the baby is only a tissue. She can't visualize the fetus as a human being, and she does not feel emotionally attached either to the fetus or to its father.

Adoption as an Unacceptable Option

None of the four women considered adoption as an option which was acceptable for them. They all felt that after nine months of pregnancy, they would have developed a strong attachment to the baby and couldn't part from it at that stage. Donna states:

> I couldn't give it up for adoption, no way! It's hard enough getting rid of it now, when it's not even a baby yet...I would just take a look at this baby and I know it will be impossible for me to give it up, especially his.

Nancy states:

> I don't think I could go through the whole pregnancy and give the baby up. I mean, you start feeling it in your stomach, and it is inside you for nine months, and there is a strong bond forming and you fall in love with that baby...I don't think I could ever part with it after birth. As I know myself, I could never give up my flesh and blood once it's alive and in my arms. I think

> abortion for me is the lesser of the two evils. Laws now are getting so lenient in finding the birth parents. I don't want to find a child in eighteen years time who will say to me: " Hi, mom, I'm here." At least now I only have to deal with my conscience.

Suzan states:

> No, I couldn't go through adoption. Part of it is a sense of responsibility (to the child), part of it is love. It couldn't have been possible for me to do it.

The effect of Past Experience and Future Plans

The abortion decision is directly related to each woman's biography and past experience. It is also affected by future goals and commitments. This link was not always readily seen by all women but each one, when facing the dilemma of unwanted pregnancy, was forced to review past experiences and bring to explicit awareness who and what she was becoming in regard to her own future.

Donna, Nancy and Betty grew up in divorced families and they recall unsatisfactory relationships with their fathers. All three experienced financial insecurity in their childhood. They express insecurity in their relationships with men and great caution when commitment to marriage is concerned. Donna and Nancy, when analyzing their decision to terminate their unwanted pregnancies, are aware of and can see the link between their early life experiences and the present decision.

Donna's parents separated when she was four years old. She does not recall early childhood memories. Only at a later age she learnt how her father deserted the family and

left her mother alone to cope and care for three young children. At present, when Donna views her past childhood she expresses great resentment towards her father's attitude:

> It all stems back from the way my parents were divorced. I feel really resentful towards men like my father. I'm totally resentful and totally bitter toward this attitude of marriage and, you know, love ever lasting, and things like that. That doesn't exist, so right now I want to feel very secure, because I guess I never felt secure before...I don't have any childhood memories at all, but from stories of my mom and friends that were around to pick up the pieces, it's only recently that I learnt about the whole story and really can't understand my dad, the way he could act like that... And that affected my security. I can't stop thinking that every man is not the same, that somehow they are all lying, that somewhere there is a catch, they'll go off drinking or something like that, or get involved with somebody else. Even though I know it probably wouldn't happen, it's always in the back of my mind. I'm not very trusting...you see, I don't want to be left like my mom. What I want is to create something for myself, just in case it ever happened. I want to feel secure before I get involved with marriage and children. My sister, for example, is getting married this summer and she is the perfect example of what I don't want for myself. They haven't got any money and will probably end up having a baby in a year's time, and that's everything that I don't wish for myself.

Nancy evaluates her present situation in the light of past experiences with her parents and especially the negative experience of her first marriage. She recalls:

> My parents are divorced. They split up when I was about 11. My father left the city and I didn't see him since then. He was a fairly weird man, very much a loner, very cold and kind of detached. He never said I love you, or hate you, or I'm lonely or anything like that. He really was an outsider in the family. My mom was the main provider for years. She worked and brought up seven kids and practically did everything. She is the one who taught me how to cope and how to fight and look after myself. He was there but not really there. I don't really hate him, but he had shattered my dreams, so I'm kind of disappointed in him.

> I'm divorced, well, we separated a year ago and the divorce was finalized three months ago. I have a boy-friend and we have a really strong relationship, but I know that if I decided to keep the baby, it will ruin it. That's what happened with my ex-husband, and I don't want it to happen again. Lots of people think that a child will enhance the relationship, but I think it can also put a lot of pressure on it to the point that the relationship can break. I was only 18 when we got married and my daughter was born when I was 19. I suppose I was quite anxious to leave home and didn't realize at the time how different we were. We were too young and didn't discuss the future, and later on I was really shocked to find out that he really wanted something else for us than what I wanted, and of course we were too young and stubborn to work out our differnces... So you see why I didn't want to find myself in a situation when I discuss marriage because of pregnancy, taking a chance it might fail again. My decision to abort might have been different if he and I had made a commitment beforehand, or if we discussed marriage and children before, but as things are now I couldn't have taken another chance.

Betty's parents got divorced five years ago. Her father left the country and remarried. The divorce left her mom bitter and resentful. Her mother's married life was focused on her family and children, never wanting or having the need to work outside the house. The divorce changed her life drastically. She was forced to assume new responsibilities and provide for her family. Betty feels very close to her mom. As she watched her going through this transition, she feels as if "she has learnt her own lesson". She concludes:

> I watched my mom going through Hell and I'm not going to repeat it. I have to stand on my own two feet before I get married and start a family. One doesn't know what waits for her in the future, so I have to prepare myself and learn a profession and make sure I can take care of myself and my children. It is wrong to rely completely on your husband.

Suzan was the only woman who retrospectively reflects upon her decision to terminate her pregnancy. She does not

elaborate on past experiences nor does she provide many details of her relationship with her family. Instead, she seemed to have a great need to talk about herself and the present time in her life. She perceives her mother as "somewhat of a martyr," a "perfect mother," who "suffered through the bringing up of her children" and who "lost her identity and independence being a mother." The way she perceives herself is in clear contrast to the way she describes her mom: "I'm 29, single, very independent, and I see myself as very much of an individual." She also describes a severe sense of guilt for "killing her own baby," an action which is in direct contrast to the devoting image of her own mother.

Assuming Responsibility for the Decision

Each woman recognized the decision as being her own. Each one recognized the unwanted pregnancy as being a mistake, but realized that she will have to take full responsibility for the decision she was making. There was no way to escape from the explicit realization that she was the one who will act bodily in conformity with her decision.

Donna and Betty stressed several times through the interview: "it's my responsibility and I have to deal with it." Nancy, too, assumes responsibility for what she considered to be her own mistake: "I think the pregnancy is my own stupidity, it's my own fault and I have no one to blame but myself...it's my own responsibility to deal with

it." Suzan concludes her abortion experience by saying: "I went through the whole thing by myself, I carried the whole lot of it, and in the end all I had is myself."

The Ambiguity of the Decision

Even though each woman expressed a certain amount of relief after the decision to have an abortion was finalized, no woman described herself as being able to feel good about it. They all felt ambivalent about the unpleasant way they had to resolve their mistake and openly admitted that their decision would have been different under other circumstances. Betty states:

> I wish this whole thing was different; if it was any other time, with someone I really cared for, I wouldn't have done it.

Donna states:

> You know, I totally agree that every woman has the right to have an abortion if she wants to. I couldn't judge a friend if she had one, but me...I really don't feel good about it. I know that I have to go through with this decision, but I really wish it could have been different.

When the decision was finalized they expressed such feelings as guilt, loss and shame. Suzan describes a strong sense of guilt after the abortion was performed. She described nightmares where she blamed herself for killing her own baby. Nancy describes how she dealt with her feelings of guilt:

> I don't let myself think of what could have become of this fetus, because I don't think I could go through with it if I dwelt on it. I had a good cry over it, but as long as I keep these thoughts separate, I can somehow deal with it.

Nancy and Suzan's ambivalence and their sense of guilt is also expressed when they talk about the possibility of punishment they anticipated for their deed. Nancy talks about a punishment from God, for what she considers a sinful deed. She says:

> I can't say I haven't thought about what punishment God might give me for this. I'm not religious, but I have my beliefs and for me it's a sin. I don't feel I have the right to play God and decide if this baby lives or dies. I hope and pray that God will understand and forgive me one day.

Suzan refers to her present pregnancy, which she is going to continue, as a "second chance," implying that she failed her first chance to produce a child, but in a way, was forgiven by becoming pregnant again.

A common sense of shame was expressed by all four women. They all acknowledged the fact that abortion is not accepted by society and therefore they will be judged harshly for their decision. As they all care about what others think about them, it creates a conflict with their own authentic decision.

Finally, all four women finalize their decision with a wish for a fresh beginning and a new start in life. At the same time they acknowledge that forgetting will be difficult, if not impossible.

Betty says:

> I'm looking forward to get on with life. It will soon be over and I'll make every effort to forget it...(pause), I don't think I'll ever manage to forget it completely. You don't forget things like that, but I just want to get on with my life.

Nancy says:

I will close the door at it because it will soon be over and done. I had the abortion and there is no way it can ever be different. At the same time, I will never forget that I had one.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The process of the abortion decision is a central concept underlying the current research. Phenomenological literature views decisions as lived processes. The results of this study clearly reveal the process through which the women of this study come to decide whether to continue or terminate an unwanted pregnancy. Moreover, the results demonstrate that the decision must be viewed within the larger context of the person's life. In the present chapter, the decision-making process in relation to abortion will be discussed, as well as its relatedness to other projects and decisions in the individual's life. In this section the findings of the present research will be related to the findings and views of other research on the decision to abort. The chapter concludes with the implications of the investigation for (a) further research (b) counselling individuals facing a decision regarding an unwanted pregnancy.

THE UNFOLDING PROCESS OF THE ABORTION DECISION

The conceptual formulation for the decision process which fits the reality of unwanted pregnancy most closely is based on the theoretical work which has taken place around the notion of decision-making under conflict. For the purpose of the present study, the most relevant theoretical

constructs are those of Janis and Mann (1974, 1977) who have depicted four psychological stages which lead to conflict resolution and a decision. These stages will be described in relation to unwanted pregnancy.

Stage 1 : Acknowledgement of pregnancy

This stage begins with the last menstrual period, when chances of pregnancy are presumably zero, and rises to a "base-line" level peculiar to each woman and dependent on a number of factors. These may include the frequency with which she has sexual intercourse and her perception of the efficacy of the contraceptive method (if any). When the next menstrual period is missed, estimates of pregnancy increase, contingent upon other factors such as regularity of normal menstrual cycles. Subsequently, other pregnancy symptoms, or lack of them, further suggest that she is or is not pregnant.

Bracken and Kasl (1975), who studied delay in seeking induced abortion, suggest that during this period, several defence mechanisms may be utilized: thus, further exposure to evidence of pregnancy may be avoided, so that possible confirmation by a physician is delayed; physiologic symptoms may be interpreted as being caused by other problems like tension or anxiety; or the whole notion of pregnancy may be repressed from consciousness or denied.

A primary interest of the present study is concerned with the type of conflict situation arising when a person is

considering two negative possibilities. Lewin (1953), specified various types of conflict situations and his theory, therefore, helps to delineate the conflicts that confronted the women in this study. According to Lewin, a person in such a situation, most frequently will try to restructure his/her life space in such a way as to be able to escape the situation entirely. If this cannot be accomplished, then escape may take on a different form. It may involve delaying or postponing movement in either direction. Another form of escape may involve flight into fantasy which creates a new dimension in the life space. If all possible means of escape fail, pressure tends to become too great and the person will be forced to move in the direction of one of the negative possibilities.

In the present study, the women's initial response to the possibility of pregnancy was one of disbelief. Denial was the only way to avoid the situation and having to face a most conflicting decision. Each woman reports that before the pregnancy was actually confirmed, she desperately hoped that she was not actually pregnant and the delay in her menstruation cycle was due to reasons other than pregnancy. These findings correspond with those reported by Bracken et. al. (1975, 1978).

Stage 2 : Formulation of alternative outcomes

During this stage, the woman investigates the options open to her. For most pregnant women it is presumably a

brief stage since, on acknowledgement that she is pregnant, there are only three possible outcomes over which she has control: she can deliver and keep the baby, she can deliver and let the baby be adopted, or she can seek an induced abortion.

None of the four women in the present study considered adoption as a viable option. They all felt that after nine months of pregnancy, they would have developed a strong attachment to the baby and could not part from it at that stage. Therefore, only two options were considered by the women in this study. They were: abortion or motherhood.

Stage 3 : Consideration of the relative merits of the available options

At this stage, the various advantages and disadvantages of motherhood versus abortion are considered through scanning and weighing each alternative. Janis and Mann (1977) have considered this as leading to a "maximization of net gains." Thus, the more factors which are taken into account at this stage of the decision, the more likely the decision will be a satisfactory one.

According to Schutz (1971), the person involved in the decision must be able to visualize or fantasize, in a relatively detailed way, the future that he is in the process of creating. Only by doing this, will the person be able to re-create the course of action which will have brought about his future act.

In the present study this process can be clearly seen. At stage 3 of the decision, each woman begins to imaginatively evaluate and see herself in the various possible worlds that would be created for her by enacting her decision. She realizes that by affirming one possible world, other future worlds and family of projects are at the same time being negated. In the light of the decision that she is making, she confirms and/or alternatively negates some image of herself and her future goals. By enacting the decision she reveals which family of projects she is committed to, as well as, which relationship she wants to continue, transform or negate.

At this stage, each woman examines and evaluates the different issues that comprise her complex situation. An analysis of these issues reveals a pattern of three major themes. These are: personal issues of autonomy and self determination; moral issues of life; and social considerations of normative expectations and support system.

Empirical studies of women's beliefs about abortion suggest that while some women consider abortion a personal issue of autonomy, control over one's body and self determination, other women consider abortion a moral issue of life (Knutson, 1973; Smetana, 1979; Smetana & Adler, 1980). According to these studies, those women who consider abortion a moral issue of life are more likely to continue pregnancy to term, while those who consider abortion a personal issue are more likely to seek abortion. Social

conventions concerning sexual mores and perceived social norms are also important determinants of the decision to abort or continue a pregnancy (Rossi, 1967). Social norms, as indexed by women's perceptions of significant others' expectations regarding their unwanted pregnancies, exert a significant influence on women's decisions to continue or terminate a pregnancy, as well as their response to abortion (Smetana & Adler, 1980; Zellman et. al., 1980).

The results of the present study reveal how each woman was engaged in evaluating personal issues, as well as her relationship to the fetus and significant others in her life. These issues were interwoven and interrelated in the decision making process. Hereafter, these three issues will be discussed separately although they are not considered as separate entities.

Personal issues

Nucci (1981) hypothesizes that control over personal issues is central to the establishement of the "self" in society. Societies may define their control over individuals more extensively than individuals may prefer. By considering an action, event, or issue as a personal matter, the individual places that event under his or her own authority. Personal reasoning is organized around the concepts of the actor as an autonomous individual and issues related to the maintenance of the self. This includes the set of behaviors that are perceived by individuals to pertain only to

themselves and that are of minor consequence to others. The personal domain is defined by actions perceived by the individual to be outside the realm of societal regulation and moral concern. Personal thought may develop from actions or events involving intrusions of privacy, respect for individuality, and control over one's physical state. Research on personal actions have included judgements about the choice of one's friends, the content of one's private communications, and control over one's body (Nucci, 1981).

The women in this study treated abortion as a personal issue. Accordingly, their personal reasoning about abortion was structured by concepts of the self and control over personal issues. Like other personal issues, it was viewed in the context of the choices an individual makes about her body and life.

The concern with making choices for one's life was found to be a consistent theme in the decision-making process regarding abortion. In the present study, each woman was already concretely engaged in efforts at embodying, as well as realizing, personal projects. Their decision reflects the extent to which pregnancy is seen as a potential obstacle to, or means of, achieving their personal goals.

Moral issues

From a moral point of view, the crux of the abortion dilemma is the issue of life. Conservative philosophers

believe that life begins at conception, that this life is God-given, and that abortion therefore involves the taking of human life - a violation of a sacred value (Callahan, 1970; Noonan, 1970). Traditionally, this viewpoint has favored the life of the child rather than the self-determination of the mother, and has been evidenced in resolutions that link the sanctioning of abortion to a more general devaluation of human life.

The arguments presented by ethicists in the philosophical debate over abortion also emerge in empirical studies of women's beliefs about abortion (Bracken, Hachamovitch & Grossman, 1974; Diamond, Steinhoff, Palmore & Smith, 1973; Knutson, 1973; Smetana & Adler, 1980). These findings suggest that there do appear to be specific beliefs about pregnancy, abortion, childbearing, and motherhood that distinguish women who choose abortion from women who continue unwanted pregnancies. Moreover, moral opposition to abortion is an important factor in decisions to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term. For instance, one investigation reveals that in contrast to women who intend to have an abortion, women who plan to continue unwanted pregnancies are more likely to believe that abortion entails terminating an unborn life, that having an abortion would be emotionally traumatic, and that they would feel guilty (Smetana & Adler, 1980). Other investigators (Bracken et.al., 1974; Diamond et.al., 1973) report that some women continue their pregnancies out of moral opposition to abortion, although

they do not specify the content of these moral beliefs.

Other research (Fischman, 1977) illustrates that while moral reasoning is an important aspect of women's thinking about abortion, it does not characterize all reasoning about abortion. Among a sample of black, unmarried teenagers who chose to have their babies, only one third of the women reported that they found abortion unacceptable because they viewed it as tantamount to "taking a life," or "destroying their own flesh and blood." The results of the above study suggest that not all women who choose to carry their unwanted pregnancies to term consider abortion solely as a moral issue. This research concludes that reasoning about abortion is not easily categorized in this manner.

In the present study, all four women considered the fetus in their decision whether to continue or terminate their unwanted pregnancy. Their views ranged from considering the unborn as a human life from the time of conception (Suzan), to believing that the fetus becomes an equal human life sometime close to, or at the time of birth (Nancy). All four women, is spite of their diverse beliefs on the moral issue of abortion, decided to terminate their unwanted pregnancies. Moreover, all four women expressed ambiguous feelings towards their decision, regardless of their attitude toward the fetus. Clearly, the moral issue of life cannot be seen as a separate entity within the decision and cannot be used as a sole indicator of the way an unwanted pregnancy would be resolved.

Social issues

The extent to which having an abortion is a woman's autonomous choice, and the degree of support she receives for this choice from significant others, can play an important role in the abortion decision. The presence of support has been empirically established as a significant factor and is closely related to women's handling of the abortion decision. Adler (1979b) reports that a common situation is one in which a woman herself wants to terminate her pregnancy but significant others are opposed or disapprove, or would be, if they knew about the situation. Potential opposition from significant others for a decision to abort is apparently managed by not telling those who are likely to oppose it. Bracken et.al. (1974) found among a sample of pregnant, unmarried women that post-abortion responses were more positive when there was greater social support for the abortion, suggesting that one source of stress on the woman is known or anticipated disapproval of significant others. Other findings (Bracken et.al., 1978) suggest that the role of the sexual partner in the decision is considerably more complex than that of other significant persons.

Societal expectations are largely reflected in one's peer group. Bracken (1978) reports that women aborting were twice as likely to have a sister who had aborted or they knew other women who went through the same experience. They may have served as role models and provided the necessary

support.

The results of the present study confirm, for the most part, the findings reported above. Each woman, with the exception of Suzan, told her partner about the pregnancy. Each expressed great relief when the decision to terminate the pregnancy was approved by her partner. Suzan was not sure of the father's identity and the relationship with her boy-friend had broken off shortly before the discovery of her pregnancy. She eventually confided in her sister, who herself went through an abortion experience. Suzan was also the one who found the abortion decision the most stressful.

Each woman in the present study recognized her right to her own opinion and choice regarding her unwanted pregnancy. At the same time, each one acknowledged the fact that the decision would not be accepted and approved by those significant others in her life. In order to preserve those meaningful relationships, they all chose to conceal the unwanted pregnancy and their subsequent decision to terminate it. By keeping the decision a secret, each woman indirectly acknowledged that she had to yield to societal norms against her own understanding of her rights to self-determination and choice. Each woman found herself assuming a sense of guilt over her decision because it is the attitude placed on her by the society. Indirectly she accepted the attitude of the society because she cared what the others think about her and needed their approval and support. The decision to have an abortion is therefore, an

interpersonal one.

Stage 4 : Commitment to chosen outcome.

During this stage the woman may inform her partner, friends, or relatives of her plans for the pregnancy. This is the beginning of the post-decisional phase, and it would be during this stage that initial contact at an abortion clinic would be made. An attitude set in favor of the choice is developed and the rejected alternatives may receive negative reinforcement.

The results of this study reveal that once a decisision was reached to terminate the unwanted and unplanned pregnancy, a change of attitude could be observed. The situation in all its concreteness takes on new dimensions and a change of attitude may follow the behavior.

Bracken (1973) studied the discrepancy between stated attitudes toward abortion and its observed behavior. He concludes that attitude-discrepant behavior almost always produces dissonance which is reduced by changing one's attitude to conform. The woman with a negative attitude towards abortion, but who decides to actually have the procedure, will experience severe dissonance between her attitude and her behavior. The discrepancy can be reduced by a change in attitude. She might believe that abortions are not so bad after-all, or she may believe that she was quite right to hold her earlier view against abortion because abortions are, in fact, even worse than what she had

thought. Alternatively, she may modify her attitude about the reasons which resulted in abortion by giving it extra importance. Changes in attitude occur because of total pregnancy experience and play an ego-defensive role in reducing conflict due to pregnancy decision. He further concludes that while this interpretation is congruent with dissonance theory, other psychological processes might also occur that could lead to quite different observations among some women.

Two of the women in the present study (Nancy and Suzan) disapproved of abortion in the past but decided to terminate their present unwanted pregnancies. Nancy experienced a change of attitude in favor of abortion and justified her decision in view of special circumstances that she had to face at that particular time in her life, such as: financial difficulties, concern for her daughter, need to preserve her relationship with her boy-friend, future plans and goals. Suzan was the only woman who retrospectively reflected on her decision to terminate her unwanted pregnancy. She continued to disapprove of abortion and did not express an attitude change after the abortion was performed. According to dissonance theory, a highly dissonant situation has been created but has not been resolved. Other processes, such as denial, ambivalence, and guilt may well be alternatives to a change of attitude in the event of attitude-discrepant behavior (Bracken, 1973). Suzan's severe sense of guilt following the abortion may reflect this lack of resolution

and a continued dissonance.

The other two women in the present study (Donna and Betty) described ambivalent feelings towards their decision to have an abortion, although they previously expressed a favorable attitude toward abortion. According to dissonance theory, dissonance should not occur, as the behavior was congruent with the attitude. Thus, it is possible to conclude that in actuality, attitudes toward decisions, such as abortion, are dependent on evaluation of numerous cognitive elements which relate to sociocultural background, personality, and personal goals and commitment. Also many factors in the interpersonal relationship would influence the attitudes toward abortion. It might be convenient to conceptualize our positive and negative evaluations of the many cognitive elements associated with abortion, as forming a structure which has cognitive consistency, but it is often not sufficient.

The ambiguity of the decision

The assumption that abortion presents a choice fraught with conflict and ambiguity has been acknowledged in literature that deals with women's experiences. The following passage on abortion by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex (1964) conveys the subtleties of the choice:

> Many women are intimidated by a morality that for them retains its prestige even though they are unable to conform to it in their behavior; they invariably respect the law they transgress and they suffer from this... In her heart, she often repudiates the interruption of the pregnancy which she is seeking to obtain. She is divided

> against herself. Her natural tendency can well be to have the baby whose birth she is undertaking to prevent; even if she has no positive desire for maternity, she still feels uneasy about the dubious act she is engaged in... An event has taken place that is a definite beginning, the progress of which is to be stopped... Some women will be haunted by the memory of this child which has not come into being. Other women may gain from abortion a sense of having destroyed a part of themselves and feel resentment against the man who has agreed to or requested it (p. 490).

The above passage clearly expresses the dilemma involved in the abortion for many women.

The results of the present study show that once a decision was reached, a commitment was made to one choice over the other and full responsibility was assumed by each woman for the decision. At the same time, the results clearly indicate the ambiguity of the decision. This ambivalence manifested itself in several ways. First, each woman postponed admitting the fact of her pregnancy as long as possible. Second, each attempted to keep the pregnancy and its resolution hidden from those significant others in her life who, she believed, would disapprove of her decision. Third, it became each woman's specific intent to forget that she had been pregnant and that she had ended the pregnancy by having an abortion. Fourth, the ambiguity of the decision was revealed by each woman through the expression of feelings such as guilt, shame and loss.

A growing body of research has studied women's responses to abortion (Adler, 1975, 1979b; Bracken et. al., 1976; Osofsky & Osofsky H., 1972; Payne et. al., 1976). The findings of these studies report that following therapeutic

abortion, women may experience a variety of emotions, both positive and negative. Adler (1975) reports that positive emotions of relief and happiness were experienced most strongly by women following abortion, but reactions to abortion are not unidimensional. Women may also feel regret, guilt or anger. The negative emotions may be separated into two factors (Adler, 1975). One factor consists of the emotions of guilt, shame and disapproval, and reflects the social stigma and norm violation associated with unwanted pregnancy and abortion. The other factor arises from the women's personal internalized concern about the pregnancy and its termination. It includes emotions of regret, anxiety, depression, doubt, and anger. These emotions reflect a source of stress which is derived from a sense of loss. According to Adler, many women are ambivalent about ending a pregnancy. In addition to the important, and often compelling reasons a woman has for wanting to terminate her pregnancy, there may be conscious or unconscious reasons for wanting to continue it. The abortion is a final closing off of whatever positive potential the pregnancy may have held. The woman may experience a sense of loss and undergo a mourning process, as reflected in the emotions in the second negative factor.

The results of the present study are consistent with the findings described above. After the decision was finalized, each woman described a feeling of relief. In addition, they expressed feelings which indicated loss,

guilt and shame. Suzan, also, retrospectively reflects on a severe sense of depression and anger. Those feelings can be interpreted in part, as an expression of a conflicted and ambivalent decison. It is important to note that Suzan described post-abortion reaction while the other three women reflected on their decision after it was finalized but not yet performed. Therefore, post-abortion reaction per-se was not actually studied in this research, but rather post-decision reactions.

Summary

The findings of the present study reveal the decision regarding abortion as an unfolding process. Utilizing Janis and Mann's (1974, 1977) model of decision-making under conflict, four stages were identified:

Stage 1 is acknowledgement of pregnancy. Defense mechanisms, such as denial of pregnancy, are used to avoid the reality of pregnancy. Eventually, pregnancy is consciously acknowledged.

Stage 2 is formulation of alternative outcomes. Since only three options are open - abortion, motherhood (in or out of wedlock) or adoption - this is a relatively brief stage. The women in the present study felt strongly against adoption and did not consider it a viable option.

Stage 3 involves consideration of the relative merits of the available options. Each woman begins to imaginatively evaluate and see herself in the various possible worlds that

would be created for her by enacting a certain decision. In this process of evaluation, three main issues are being considered: personal issues, relationship with the fetus, and relationship with significant others.

Stage 4 occurs when a commitment is made to one choice over the other. At this stage, a general change of attitude can be observed. In the present study one woman developed an attitude set in favor of her choice, two women exprssed ambivalent feelings towards abortion although prior to getting pregnant they held favorable attitude toward abortion. One woman did not experience a change in her negative attitude toward abortion.

All four women recognized that their decision was irrevocable and therefore assumed full responsibility for their chosen alternative. Nevertheless, it is possible to conclude that the decision remained an ambivalent one even after a commitment was undertaken for the final decision.

THE DECISION WITHIN ONE'S LIFE PROJECTS

All the phenomenological literature on decision making, which was reviewed in chapter II, recognizes the notion of project as critical to the understanding of any particular concrete decision. Project, as defined by Cloonan (1971) is "the past as continuing or projecting into the present and future on the basis of experience " (p. 124). Decisions are "moments" in the definition of one's project.

Cloonan's research (1971) speaks of projects at two levels: "life project" and "situational project." "Life project" is the theme that permeates a person's life as a whole. "Situational projects" are the current articulators and definers of "life project." It is through the variety of decision-making situations that the life project is further clarified and re-affirmed.

Applying Cloonan's findings to the present study, it can be understood how each woman was forced by the event of the unwanted, unexpected, and unplanned pregnancy to question and re-evaluate her immediate situational projects, i.e., what each woman was pursuing at the time of the pregnancy, such as: continuing university studies, going to graduate school, working and saving money towards further education. Each woman was called upon to articulate what course of action she would pursue and what immediate, as well as long term projects, she would remain committed to. Even though each woman, in further clarifying her situational project, chose to have an abortion, it did not necessarily mean that she did not want to have a child. In fact, each woman stated that it was one of her future intentions to have a child and to be a mother. That is to say, the decision in relation to her immediate situational project, was not a negation so much as an attempt to postpone a desired future project to have a child.

Sartre (1964) points out that since the decision is a component of the project, the reasons and motives for making

the decision are also part of the project's structure. When a project is chosen, the reasons and motives for making a particular decision are also chosen. Therefore, it is only by knowing what family of projects one wants to pursue or preserve that the individual making a decision comes to recognize his motives for any particular decision. In the present study, the motives for each woman's decisions had roots in her respective projects. Upon confronting and questioning herself, each woman became aware and was able to recognize her life projects. She then decided to act in accordance with that family of projects. She did not first have motives which, in turn, led to her family of projects. Rather, her life projects gave birth to her motives and reasons. On the other hand, motives and reasons, as they are lived out, concretize and specify the particular meaning of the projects.

Schutz (1970) calls attention to two types of motives: "in order to" and "because" motives. Both types can be seen in the present study. The "in order to" motives can be identified when the women chose to have an abortion in order to preserve or pursue future projects. The "because" motives clarify the projects in terms of the women's past experience. The interrelatedness of past, present, and future experiences is recognized by all the phenomenological literature, as stated by Sardello (1978):

> Past and future are interwined in the moment we call now. The present constantly influences and alters the past while the present is given direction by the past and is given possible form in the anticipation of the

future (p. 142).

Each woman finds herself making a decision within the context of a personally unique situation. Past experiences and projects serve as the ground, out of which the decision emerges. The decision, in turn, points toward and concretizes the meaning of the projects. When decisions are viewed from within the individual's ongoing biography, even a radical change of projects is understandable. Therefore, in order for the decision to be fully understood, it must be seen in its interrelatedness with these projects, as it emerges from each woman's existential situation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

The findings of this research have emerged from a particular study of four young, unmarried women who became pregnant by mistake and who subsequently chose to have an abortion. It is understood that a different subject population might reveal a different style of decision making, based on differing life circumstances. This conclusion has implications for further research. For example, one could attempt to study the decision processes of older women, those who are unmarried, and imminently near the end of their child-bearing years. A similar study could direct its attention toward women who are married and who already have children. It is quite likely, that this population would reveal another style of decision-making based on its particular set of life circumstances. Another

population of subjects that could reveal significant data on the decision-making process would be unmarried women, who faced an unwanted pregnancy, but who chose to continue the pregnancy and to keep the child, rather than have an abortion.

Pregnancy decisions are made within larger societal constraints. It is likely, that variations in abortion legislation and continuing changes in attitudes toward, and services for, abortion will have significant effect on the decision regarding abortion (Bracken & Kasl, 1976; Bracken et.al., 1978). It seems likely that a legal, safe abortion, will have a different impact on a woman's decision than an illegal procedure. In the latter, the procedure is not only likely to be far more physically painful and traumatic, carrying a significantly greater risk of morbidity and mortality, but it is also likely to be done under clandestine circumstances. There has been no research on the differences in decision-making regarding abortion under these different circumstances, probably due in large part to the difficulty of obtaining samples of women undergoing illegal versus legal abortions (Adler, 1979b). The question that arises is that if abortions could only be obtained illegally, or at great expense, how would it affect the decision-making process.

Further research could also be conducted upon significant life decisions other than abortion. These could be studied for variations in decision-making style, as well

as for various meanings given to particular life decisions. Finally, research might compare the similarities and differences among significant life decisions. All of these research possibilities could help to further clarify the nature of a significant decision in one's life.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

The abortion experience varies in the amount and kinds of stress it produces for the woman. The extent to which it creates a crisis for a woman depends upon the meaning of the pregnancy to her, as well as upon the nature of the social environment surrounding the abortion process. This view suggests that some aspects of the abortion experience might be improved if changes are made in the general social environment and in the treatment of women in the medical setting. There are, however, some inevitable conflicts associated with abortion that are unlikely to diminish. While women may experience less social stigma if abortion becomes more accepted as a medical procedure, it is not likely that their experience of loss will disappear. Thus, there is a continued need for intervention - such as counseling - to help women anticipate and cope with the stresses associated with abortions.

Various research has suggested the positive effects of abortion counseling (Adler, 1979b; Baldwin, 1973; Spaght et. al., 1973). It was concluded that the level of satisfaction felt by women about their ultimate choice may be influenced

by whether or not they received counseling and the type of counseling they received. A general goal of most abortion counseling is to give each woman an opportunity to discuss her decision with a neutral person. This is done to assure that she is not being coerced into the abortion and that she is well informed about the choices that she can make (not included here is counseling that is specifically designed to discourage women from seeking abortion).

The findings of this study have further implications for the provision of counseling for women who face an unwanted pregnancy:

First, if those in the helping profession are to provide useful counseling to women making decisions about the outcome of unwanted pregnancy, they must understand the factors that influence the decision to deliver or abort. However, even more important in this kind of counseling is the appreciation of the actual decision-making process. The counselor should be able to identify the psychological stage in the decision-making process that the woman has reached and help her proceed to a responsible decision.

Second, it is important for the abortion counselor not to lose sight of the crucial differences in decision-making among individuals. Counselors must be sensitive to the qualitatively different meanings ascribed to abortion and to the relationship between these meanings and the chchoices women make to resolve their unplanned pregnancies. While a focus upon the issues foremost to the client is always

consistent with good counseling technique, it is especially important to underscore here.

Third, this research shows that a decision cannot be understood as an isolated phenomenon, but must be looked at within the unique context of the person's life. The counselor should help the woman explore the meaning of the decision in light of her past experiences and future goals and commitments. This study demonstrated that the decision to have an abortion cannot be isolated from the rest of the pregnant woman's world. Her anticipated future affects her decision and will be directly influenced by the present decision. Therefore, she needs to be fully aware of the meaning and significance of this particular decision on her life.

Fourth, as the abortion issue is often emotionally charged and highly contested, it is recommended that prior to becoming a pregnancy counselor, a worker should be provided with an opportunity to explore his/her own thoughts and feelings towards both pregnancy and abortion. Each potential counselor needs to be fully aware of her/his own views about the issue and how she/he can potentially affect or indirectly influence the decision.

Fifth, the pregnancy counselor often observes how upset and vulnerable the pregnant woman can be. In the face of the pregnant woman's vulnerability, the counselor may tend to back off and allow for the suppression of meaning to continue. Too often, an unannounced agreement exists between

the counselor and the pregnant woman not to look at the meaning of having an abortion or continuing the pregnancy, in order to escape its emotional impact. However, in reality, the pregnant woman would be less vulnerable if she was encouraged to look at all the meanings, both personal and interpersonal, and long term ramifications that surround her pregnancy and possible abortion. In the present study, data collected on subjects' responses to the interview itself were overwhelmingly positive. Women stated that the probing, which provided them with an opportunity to explore their own thinking with an impartial other, was not only highly beneficial, but for some, their most important experience in thinking through the decision.

In view of these findings, it is suggested that it is the task of the counselor to confront the pregnant woman with her world in such a way as to enable her to have a broader, fully understood range of options. It is essential that each woman understands the full significance of her decision. This understanding will ultimately increase her level of satisfaction and is likely to provide her with an opportunity for increasing her personal growth.

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Appendix A

A General Interview Guide

Background information to be incorporated in the interview:

age:

occupation:

education:

religion, degree of involvement:

marital status:

partner's age, occupation:

family of origin:

no. of previous pregnancies:

no. of weeks pregnant:

Guide-line questions.

1. How did you make the decision to terminate your pregnancy?
   a. What was your first reaction when you first suspected that you were pregnant?
   b. What choices did you see as being open to you?
   c. What were your reasons both for or against each alternative?
   d. What issues did you consider in your decision?
   e. What factors were most important in your decision?
2. What role did your partner/parents/friends play in the decision?
3. Did the decision force you to come into conflict with, or come to terms with what you believe in?
4. When, in general, do you think abortion should be permitted? why?
5. When in the course of its development would you say the

fetus becomes a human life?

a. How does that affect your judgements of the rightness or wrongness of abortion?

6. Should women have the right to make decisions about abortion? why/why not?

How would not having the right to make decisions about abortion affect your feelings of personal choice?

7. Have your feelings changed about abortion since you found out you are pregnant?

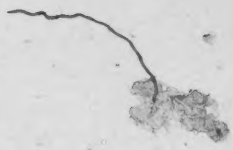
8. Which experiences in your past have affected or played a part in your decision?

9. How do you anticipate that this decision will affect your life?

10. How do you feel about the decision after it has been finalized?

11. What was this interview like for you?

Appendix B



Subject Information

Donna

Age: 19

Single;

Attends second year in university;

Religion: Anglican Church; not active;

Partner: Student, in his early 20's;

Parents divorced. Mother currently employed as a nursing aid;

Siblings include one sister and a brother;

Donna had a previous abortion at the age of fourteen;

Suzan

Age: 29

Single;

Currently employed as a kindergarten teacher; had completed four years of university and had been accepted into a program of graduate studies.

Religion: Protestant; not active.

Suzan's relationship with her boy-friend had broken off shortly before the termination of her pregnancy.

Mother: Housewife;

Father: Self-employed;

Subject's siblings include four sisters. One sister has had an abortion at the age of 16. She is currently a single mother to a 6 months old baby.

Suzan is planning to marry her present boy-friend and therefore made the decision to continue the pregnancy and

have the child. In the interview, she retrospectively reflected on a previous decision to have an abortion, which took place six months prior to the time of the interview.

Nancy

Age; 22

Currently works at a book-store. Completed high-school.

Religion: Protestant; not active;

Partner: Divorced, father of one child; Self-employed; age 35.

Parents divorced;

Siblings include 7 brothers and sisters.

Nancy is divorced and lives with her 3 year old daughter.

Betty

Age: 20

Currently works as a cosmetician; completed high-school and plans to study fashion design.

Religion: Protestant; not active.

Partner: Student, in his early 20's.

Parents divorced.

Siblings include two sisters.